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ABSTRACT

To examine the influence of Western perspectives on indigenous language teaching, a two-dimensional framework of approaches to language teaching is presented. A horizontal continuum concerning the nature of language ranges between form and function, and a vertical continuum concerning the nature of language learning ranges between construction and emergence, creating four quadrants into which language teaching approaches are grouped according to their basic assumptions. The formal-construction quadrant includes grammar practice, skills-based, and phonics approaches; the functional-construction quadrant contains the total physical response and functional-notional approaches; the formal-emergence quadrant includes the natural approach and innate language abilities such as Chomsky's language acquisition device; and the functional-emergence quadrant contains the whole language, emergent literacy, immersion, and communicative approaches. The model provides a useful way for indigenous language teachers to examine the assumptions and implications of various Western approaches to language teaching and decide which are appropriate for their community. The model can also be used for examining underlying assumptions and properties of traditional, indigenous approaches to language use, transmission, and acquisition. A principled eclectic approach may be most effective because language is both form and function, and can be internalized through practice and acquired through natural communicative use. It is important to involve the community in decisions about how to teach a language, so that local factors specific to particular indigenous languages are considered. (Contains 38 references.) (TD)

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An Examination of Western Influences on Indigenous Language Teaching

J. Dean Mellow

This paper examines how various "Western" approaches to teaching languages are influencing how Indigenous languages are currently being taught. A two-dimensional model of approaches to language teaching is described and compared to research on language teaching in general and indigenous language teaching in particular. The paper concludes with a recommendation that language educators use a principled eclectic approach to language teaching that draws on what we know generally about teaching languages as well as what is known about unique local factors specific to particular indigenous languages and communities.

"Why do we have to listen to a non-Indian talk about linguistics? We are trying to teach our students orally. Why do we need him to tell us how to teach the language? He never lived like an Indian, so why does he think his way of teaching will be effective? He never walked in my moccasins and never will."

I received this written comment from an indigenous language teacher when I presented a paper at an indigenous language conference in 1997. In that paper, I attempted to indicate how indigenous language teaching pedagogies have been strongly influenced by two Western (or non-Indian) approaches to language teaching: (i) form-focused/grammar-oriented, and (ii) communicative. In many instances, syllabi and textbooks had been primarily developed according to only one of these Western approaches to language teaching. My purposes in that paper were to make participants aware of the diversity of approaches within English language teaching (both as first and second languages) and to suggest ways in which indigenous language teaching approaches could be locally developed and could be more inclusive of diverse activities.

In response to my original purposes and to this comment, in this paper I explicitly examine the influence of Western perspectives on indigenous language teaching. The paper is comprised of three parts. First, I propose a two-dimensional framework of approaches to language teaching, suggesting four types of language teaching activities. Second, I indicate how a number of approaches to indigenous language teaching have adopted and utilized specific Western approaches. Third, I discuss several aspects of pedagogical decision-making, including the examination of underlying assumptions and implications, the potential value of principled eclecticism, and the importance of the local determination of educational practices.

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A two-dimensional model of approaches to language teaching

In this section I propose a two-dimensional model of approaches to language teaching. The dimensions of the model correspond to two basic theoretical commitments within any approach to language teaching (for additional discussions of the linguistic and psycholinguistic assumptions of language teaching approaches see Larsen-Freeman, 1986 and Richards & Rogers, 1986). The first dimension indicates the assumption that an approach makes about the nature of language, indicated as a dichotomy between *form* and *function*. Thus, some approaches largely focus on language as a structural system composed of forms such as phonemes (sounds), intonation patterns, morphemes (including conjugations), words, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and turns (within a conversation). In contrast, other approaches largely focus on language as a system for expressing meanings, including past time, plurality, definiteness, reference (e.g., to entities such as books and teachers and to actions such as speaking and eating), requests, commands, apologies, questions, politeness, respect, and narration, among many others. Because functional approaches focus on the meanings that are communicated, language is usually considered in relation to the contexts of use in which meaning is situated.

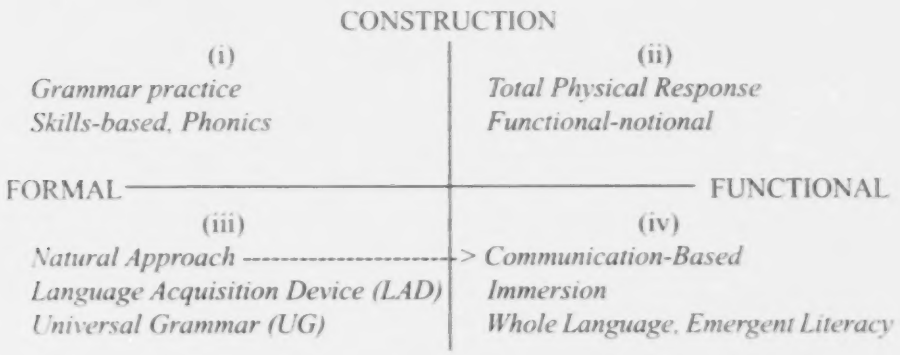
The second dimension indicates the assumption that an approach makes about the nature of language learning, indicated as a dichotomy between *construction* and *emergence*. Thus, some approaches largely conceive of language learning as a process of active construction by the learner. In other words, language learning is thought to result from the cognitive processing involved in the comprehension of extensive input (both written and spoken) and the production of extensive output (both in writing and speech) in the form of practice, drills, exercises, and other guided, negotiated, or corrected language activities. In particular, the construction view assumes that new elements can be added to a learner's internal language system as a result of extensive processing, and input and output practice will result, over time, in the automatization or internalization of sounds, words, and form-meaning patterns. The construction approach, with the emphasis on practice and automatization, is informed by theoretical positions such as those discussed in N. Ellis (1999) and McLaughlin (1990). The term construction is used to evoke the idea of a house being constructed through a variety of deliberate building processes.

In contrast to the assumption of construction, other teaching approaches largely conceive of language learning as a process of emergence. Within these approaches, essential aspects of language learning are thought to result from innate cognitive abilities that only rely upon a subset of the input that a learner receives, and language emerges best in response to normal communicative language input. The emergence approach makes three important assumptions. First, language is hypothesized to emerge in a learner according to the learner's own internal syllabus, largely as a result of innate, biological, language-specific predispositions. Following the influential work of Noam Chomsky, in the 1960s and 1970s these innate abilities were often referred to as the Language Acquisition Device (or LAD). Since about 1980, Chomsky and his colleagues have

used the term Universal Grammar (or UG) to refer to the hypothesized innate abilities. Second, language development is hypothesized to result only partially from the learner's general cognitive operations. For example, it is claimed that syntactic patterns are not learned with processes such as generalization, induction, deduction, and automatization. Consequently, deliberate practice and exercises are thought to contribute only minimally to development. Third, language development is hypothesized to rely only partially on the linguistic environment (e.g., the environment does not provide sufficient information for a learner to construct a knowledge of language) or responds only to certain types of linguistic environments (e.g., deductive instruction and correction of forms do *not* contribute to development). The emergence approach, with its emphasis on innate abilities and a de-emphasis of practice and automatization, is informed by the theoretical positions such as those discussed in Chomsky (1986), Goodman et al. (1987), and Krashen (1982, 1985). The term emergence is used to evoke the idea of a plant growing or emerging as a result of natural processes.

These two dimensions can be combined to create a model of different approaches to language teaching. If the first dimension corresponds to a horizontal axis and the second dimension corresponds to a vertical axis, then the intersection of the two dimensions creates the quadrants represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Four quadrants within a two-dimensional model of approaches to language teaching



As indicated in Figure 1, the four sections or quadrants of this framework of approaches to language teaching are: (i) formal-construction, (ii) functional-construction, (iii) formal-emergence, and (iv) functional-emergence. Several language teaching approaches have been placed into the four quadrants, based on the degree to which each adopts specific assumptions regarding language and language learning. Specific approaches are discussed in detail below. In addition to approaches that primarily adopt one of these four perspectives, a fifth type of language teaching is one that is eclectic, using activities from more than one quadrant of the framework.

The dimensions of this model are presented in a very simple way, as dichotomies. Consequently, the model could be significantly enriched if the axes were treated as continua which acknowledge that language is both form and function and that language learning results from some active construction by the learner as well as from biological and cognitive abilities that respond to normal communicative interaction and input. In addition, the model could be enriched by adding other dimensions of assumptions within language teaching. However, this simplistic categorization of teaching approaches may be valuable for educators because it indicates the assumptions that are adopted by certain approaches to language teaching.

Categorizing approaches to indigenous language teaching

A number of approaches to indigenous language teaching are characterized in terms of their explicit use of Western approaches. The majority of the examples are found in the published proceedings of Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposia (Cantoni, 1996; Reyhner, 1997; Reyhner et al., 1999). Examples are discussed in relation to the four quadrants as well as to an eclectic approach that includes activities from more than one quadrant.

Formal-construction: Within Western approaches to language teaching, examples of formal-construction approaches include the Grammar-Translation, Audiolingual, Skills-based, and Back-to-the-Basics/Phonics approaches (cf. Langan, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rogers, 1986). Historically, many early approaches to indigenous language teaching adopted formal-construction assumptions. To a certain extent, this early trend can be attributed to the dominance of the structural linguistic paradigm (with its emphasis on phonology, morphology, and syntax) in North America and to the involvement of structural linguists in the description, preservation, and teaching of indigenous languages. The emphasis on grammatical structures and practice can be seen in the following directive from a Cree (northern Canada) language textbook (C. D. Ellis, 1983, p. 414): "Discuss something or things belonging to a third person, and *practise* Inanimate Intransitive describing *verbs* in the obviative taking care to mark singular versus plural *verbs*" [italics added]. An example of a recent teaching approach that adopts formal-construction assumptions is Kushner (1999). Kushner (1999, p. 76) describes Arikara (North Dakota) multimedia language lessons that follow a traditional, grammatical approach to instruction:

> The Grammar segment explicitly describes how words function in model sentences in the Conversation segment. However, the explanation is in nontechnical terms and is illustrated with examples in Arikara and English as necessary. This way, although the student may not fully appreciate the *grammatical explanations*, he or she may *internalize* the rule through repeated exposure to examples.... Then, the student engages in exercises *practicing* these rules with the content he or she has already learned. [italics added]

Drawing from the results of instructional experiments and from theoretical constructs such as *consciousness raising*, Kushner's approach focuses on grammatical rules and on internalization that may be achieved through practice.

Functional-construction: Within Western approaches to language teaching, an example of a functional-construction approach is the Functional-notional approach, with its use of linguistic categories such as exchange factual information, exchange emotional attitudes, and socializing (e.g., van Ek, 1987). Another example is Total Physical Response or TPR (Asher, 1977), discussed below. A number of recent approaches to indigenous language teaching have adopted functional-construction assumptions. To a certain extent these approaches have been a reaction to earlier emphases on grammatical practice. For example, Oller and Littlebear (1996, p. 114), in a summary of a November 1995 Education Roundtable, discuss this concern for the functional use of language:

> Richard Littlebear thought there was too much stress today in classroom second language instruction on superficial grammatical analysis that just does not work. It makes no sense to have students who can name colors, body parts, and the like in isolation, but who cannot participate in conversations, give simple directions, tell a story, take part in a drama, carry out instructions, and the like.

Functional-construction assumptions can be seen in the advocation of TPR activities for indigenous language teaching by Littlebear and Martinez (1996) and by Cantoni (1999). TPR is a teaching approach that emphasizes functional units of language, especially the command or imperative. Richards and Rogers (1986, p. 89) point out that advanced TPR lessons use other speech acts, such as requests and apologies. Through repeated physical responses to commands, TPR also utilizes extensive practice to develop receptive language skills. Although the theoretical principles underlying TPR are more complex than is indicated by the two-dimensional model (cf. Adley-SantaMaria, 1997; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rogers, 1986), these recent uses of TPR indicate the explicit adoption of functional-construction assumptions for indigenous language teaching.

Formal-emergence: Formal-emergence assumptions are a central part of one of the most influential Western language teaching approaches, the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). A number of indigenous language educators have adopted or advocated the Natural Approach (e.g., Klokeid & Ratt, 1989, for Cree; Littlebear & Martinez, 1996, pp. 234-239). The empirical support motivating Krashen's approach is largely based upon an analysis of the development of grammatical structures such as English morphemes, as well as negation and question structures (Krashen, 1985, pp. 20-21). Krashen (1982, pp. 10 & 84) has also strongly articulated the claim that language development does not result from certain general cognitive processes, such as internalization:

> The acquisition-learning distinction is perhaps the most fundamental of all the hypotheses to be presented here. It states that adults have two

> distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second language. . . . this process of converting learned *rules* into acquired *rules* was called 'internalization.' Despite our feelings that internalization does occur, the theory predicts that it does not, except in a trivial way. Language acquisition, according to the theory presented in Chapter II, happens in one way, when the acquirer understands input containing a *structure* that the acquirer is 'due' to acquire. [italics added]

Instead of attributing language development to internalization, Krashen (1985, pp. 2-3) claimed that innate language abilities play an important role in acquisition and that not all input contributes to acquisition:

> The acquirer does not simply acquire what he hears—there is a significant contribution of the internal language processor (Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device: LAD). Not all the input the acquirer hears is processed for acquisition, and the LAD itself generates possible *rules* according to innate procedures. [italics added]

As Krashen indicates, the theoretical assumptions of the Natural Approach focus on language structures and rules. In addition, the assumptions minimize the role of general learning processes, minimize the value of production activities, and minimize the importance of all input. Instead, Krashen focuses on selective pieces of input that must be correctly timed in order to trigger rule development by a hypothetical Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Because of the difficulty in predicting which pieces of input are hypothetically necessary for which learners, Krashen advocates flooding learners with comprehensible input that is likely to include the necessary triggering input. Although motivated by different theoretical assumptions, the language learning activities proposed within the Natural Approach are similar to those proposed by communicative and immersion approaches (discussed below). This similarity is indicated in Figure 1 by the dashed arrow that extends from the Natural Approach into the functional-emergence quadrant. Because of the complexity of the theory underlying the Natural Approach, it is not generally clear whether indigenous language educators advocate the use of the Natural Approach because of its assumptions or because of the types of communication-oriented activities that it includes.

Functional-emergence: Within Western approaches to language teaching, examples of functional-emergence approaches include the Whole Language, Emergent Literacy, Immersion, and Communicative approaches (e.g., Goodman et al., 1987; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Pappas et al., 1990; Richards & Rogers, 1986). Many recent approaches to indigenous language teaching have adopted functional-emergence assumptions. For example, Adley-SantaMaria (1997) advocates the use of a combination of Communication-Based Instruction, Master-Apprentice Language Learning, and Immersion methods for teaching White Mountain Apache (Arizona). Adley-SantaMaria (1997, p. 139) indicates that Communication-Based Instruction is based on the view "that function (what

language is used for) should be emphasized rather than the forms of language (correct grammatical or phonological structure)." In order to explain the rationale for immersion (and Master-Apprentice Language Learning) programs, Adley-SantaMaria builds from Hinton (1994). Hinton argues that fluent language use is not effectively learned by focusing on grammar and writing. Instead, Hinton (1994, pp. 18-19) claims that fluent language use is learned best through "just listening and talking, talking and listening," and through "being immersed in an environment where the language is the dominant one being used." Thus, the approaches that Adley-SantaMaria advocates make assumptions that can be characterized as functional-emergence, with language hypothesized to emerge in response to normal communicative language use.

Eclecticism: Although some language teaching methodologies can generally be placed within one of the quadrants in Figure 1, many Western approaches could be characterized as principled or enlightened eclecticism (cf. Brown, 1994). These eclectic methodologies involve a principled combination of a variety of learning activities. I believe that eclecticism also describes the reality of what many teachers actually do, selecting a variety of activities for their classes, rather than exclusively following one teaching method. Many indigenous language educators have proposed methodologies that involve a principled combination of activities. For example, de Reuse (1997) proposes language learning textbooks for Western Apache (Arizona) that include both grammar-translation and TPR style activities. These two types of activities have been previously classified as formal-construction and functional-construction, respectively.

An additional example of an eclectic approach is Cantoni (1999). Previously, I noted that Gina Cantoni advocated TPR activities. In addition, she suggests the use of story telling activities and discusses using a wide range of activities such as story creation, writing, revising, acting out, retelling, and videotaping. These content-based or communicative activities are presumably informed by functional-emergence assumptions, with language emerging as a result of the learners being actively engaged in these meaningful activities. Furthermore, Cantoni argues that TPR-Storytelling applies some of Krashen's principles, including the concern for the provision of comprehensible input. As noted earlier, Krashen's theories are derived from formal-emergence assumptions. Finally, Cantoni (1999, p. 57) proposes that teachers might also provide polite error correction, especially in interactive journals. In this way, the teacher might respond to an ungrammatical utterance with one that models the correct form. This inductive correction of ungrammatical utterances presumably draws upon formal-construction assumptions. Overall, Cantoni proposes the use of language learning activities that could be placed in all of the quadrants of the two-dimensional model. By carefully discussing when and why each of the activity types might be used, Cantoni advocates a form of principled eclecticism.

Pedagogical decision-making

The analysis in the previous section suggests a number of implications for pedagogical decision-making. First, because indigenous language teachers have

explicitly adopted or advocated the use of a wide variety of Western approaches to language teaching, educators will want to consider the assumptions and implications of these many approaches in order to determine which pedagogies are appropriate for the needs of their own community. The two-dimensional model presented in this paper may provide a useful way in which to examine these assumptions.

In addition, the two-dimensional model may provide a starting place for examining the underlying assumptions and properties of traditional, indigenous approaches to language use, transmission, and acquisition. Indigenous language teachers could determine whether the dimensions and values of the model provide insight into the nature of traditional pedagogical practices. Indigenous educators could also determine other dimensions that characterize important aspects of traditional learning and teaching processes. For example, as indicated by the quotation that began this paper, a number of indigenous language educators are currently considering the mode of language use (spoken vs. written), discussing the value of using written learning activities within cultural traditions that involve only oral language use (cf. Bennett et al., 1999; Bielenberg, 1999; Littlebear, 2000). An additional dimension of traditional curricular planning is the extent to which the learners themselves are involved in the creation and sequencing of their own learning activities (e.g., Jones & Bedonie, 2000; cf. the process syllabus of Breen, 1987). Finally, indigenous educators have considered the overall structure of classroom activities or tasks. An example of this dimension of curricular planning is seen in the thematic units of Jones and Bedonie (2000). The planning of these units utilizes the four cyclic stages of the Diné Educational Philosophy Framework: Nitsáhákees (thinking and generating ideas), Nahat'á (planning and implementing), Iiná (achieving and producing), and Sihasin (evaluation and reflection). It seems possible that the dimensions of the model presented in this paper are complementary to these other traditional dimensions of curricular planning.

A second implication for pedagogical decision-making is that the most effective approaches may be eclectic in a principled manner. I support the position of principled eclecticism because language is both form and function, and because I believe that language can be internalized through practice and can be acquired through natural communicative use. As illustrated in Cantoni (1999), a combination of activities may best be able to maximize language learning, may appeal to different teaching and learning styles, and may provide variety in classroom activities, stimulating and motivating learners. The two-dimensional model provides an initial set of categories for selecting learning and teaching activities. For example, a language teacher might adopt some form of principled eclecticism, sometimes using structural training (e.g., to practice intonation contours or to memorize vocabulary), sometimes using functional drills (e.g., to practice politely and respectfully addressing one's elders), sometimes using communicative activities (e.g., to communicate complex meanings or content in realistic language tasks), and sometimes deciding that certain structures, especially complex structures, cannot easily be taught and hence not using class time for those structures.

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully consider the principles that could motivate these decisions, I will suggest several factors that might be utilized (see also Celce-Murcia, 1991). One principle could be a psycholinguistic concern regarding learnability. Certain elements may be late acquired or may only be acquired in a developmental sequence, and therefore are not likely to be quickly acquired as a result of formal-construction activities. An additional principle might be the contextual factor of intended purpose. For example, learners seeking to master academic, literate, or ceremonial varieties of language use may especially benefit from formal-construction activities. In contrast, learners seeking to develop conversational or informal varieties may especially benefit from functional-emergence activities. Another principle might consider the vitality of an indigenous language: Efforts to revive a language through schooling may need to rely upon formal-construction activities because of the limited range of use of the language in day to day community activities. Finally, although eclecticism may generally consider the combination of different activities into a larger curriculum, individual activities themselves might combine form and function and/or construction and emergence. For example, Long (1998, p. 40) argues for the value of Focus-on-Form activities, instructional practices that shift students' focal attention by "briefly drawing students' attention to linguistic elements (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patterns, and so on), *in context*, as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication" (original emphasis retained). Focus-on-Form activities would be located at the center of the four quadrants, combining factors that are sometimes separated by other pedagogical approaches.

A third implication for pedagogical decision-making is that the two-dimensional model provides information that can inform that decision-making, but it does not indicate the values that educators should hold in making those decisions. As indicated in the quotation that began this paper, decisions about how to teach a language need to be made locally, in conjunction with the community (e.g., Ashworth, 1985). Local decisions are essential because only expert native speakers will fully understand the uniqueness and complexity of their language, allowing for effective and appropriate choices about the language content to be taught. In addition, because education alone is not the solution for stabilizing indigenous languages, maximally effective language teaching programs must be supported by efforts in the home and community to continue the intergenerational transmission of mother-tongues (e.g., Oller & Littlebear, 1996).

Furthermore, as indicated in studies of rural education, outside decision-makers may not be sensitive to local concerns, resulting in conflicts between local and regional decision-making and between the need for locally relevant classroom content, often related to the local culture, and the need for nationally relevant knowledge, potentially providing access to high status academic and literate knowledge (Foldes, 1989; Mellow, 1992; Nash, 1980, pp. 18, 20-35, 55-59). Finally, pedagogical decision-making will also need to consider the characteristics of successful educational change. In their review of 75 years of attempted educational changes, Orlosky and Smith (1972, p. 414) noted the following trends:

> A change that requires the teacher to abandon an existing practice and to displace it with a new practice risks defeat. . . . Curricular changes involving the addition of subjects or the updating of content are more permanent than changes in the organization and structure of the curriculum. Efforts to change the curriculum by integrating or correlating the content, or by creating new category systems into which to organize the content, are made at great risk. Complete or considerable displacement of an existing curriculum pattern is not likely to be permanent even if the faculty initially supports the change.

Thus, pedagogical changes must be very sensitive to the existing local practices. Attempts to significantly alter the existing teaching practices are unlikely to be permanent.

I hope this paper has indicated positive ways in which Western research and practice can contribute to indigenous language teaching. Western educational ideas and practices have had a significant influence on approaches to indigenous pedagogy. This two dimensional framework for understanding these influences may contribute to effective and selective local pedagogical decision-making. The framework may also provide a starting place for understanding the assumptions and properties of traditional indigenous approaches to language use, learning, and teaching.

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